

# The Future of (High) Culture in America



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Edited by

Daniel Asia

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For  
Carolee T. Asia  
Who makes it all  
gloriously worthwhile  
and our children  
Shoshana  
Reuben  
&  
Eve



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# INTRODUCTION

DANIEL ASIA

The content of this book, *The Future of (High) Culture In America*, represents a collaboration among practicing artists, critics, educators, and other professionals involved in the cultural dialogue, in the performing hall, museums, and in the marketplace. The title can be taken either as a statement or as a question; it is, after all, a matter of inflection. Depending on the emphasis, the title answers, or raises the question: is there high culture in America, and if so, will it be in jeopardy sometime in the (near) future? At the very least, this presents us with an opportunity to consider what the word “culture” or the phrase “high culture” means.

The mission of the University of Arizona Center for American Culture and Ideas (CACI) is to explore the function and impact of the arts—in particular, the high arts—and culture in America today. We include in this purview music, dance, and visual arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, and photography) from the standpoint of aesthetics or connoisseurship. As our scope expands, we would like to also include film, fashion, and other areas that in our opening publication were out of range due to limitations in manpower, time, and resources.

By necessity, CACI also extends its investigations to the relationship of high art to mass, or popular, culture. We recognize that there has always been a reciprocal relationship between the two. One need think only of Steve Reich’s musical influence on the Club scene, of street dance and hip-hop on our major ballet choreographers, of the ephemera of pop culture found in Warhol’s art, or of the impact technology has on the way artistic production is imagined, tested, and realized. At the same time we recognize that this relationship is nothing new—Haydn incorporated popular courtly dance, the minuet, into his rather high-minded symphonies. We wish to help make this historical legacy better understood. Rather than submitting to the post-modern blurring of these distinctions or “boundaries,” we hope to refine our understanding of the relationship

between the two cultures in order to finally make those difficult judgments of ultimate value and worth.

In this, our first publication, we have asked a number of artists, educators, and critics to trace our cultural footprint into the present day and to share their views of where we are now and where we might be heading. Each contributor was left to define the task according to his or her own understanding or point of view. The idea was to allow sufficient latitude for a strong individual, even idiosyncratic, approach. The result is what we had hoped for—a kaleidoscopic view of our subject.

Terry Teachout presents a broad general overview of the artistic and academic landscape. Paul Pines looks at changes in human psychological development and cognition in response to the overwhelming density of information and speed of change in the past century. Jan Swafford provides an intimate and witty history of classical, or serious, music from the founding of the American colonies until now. Carol Iannone does something similar to Teachout's overview in revisiting Plato's apprehension of inherent dangers in the arts. Elizabeth Kendall narrates the history and current state of ballet and dance in this post-Balanchine age. Britt Salveson presents the curious, ambiguous, and polymorphous nature of photography in the post-modern museum environment and examines its interaction with our larger, omnipresent visual culture. Finally, I offer one pedagogical answer to the conundrum of how to nurture an understanding of high culture in an academic environment through our pan-arts course, *Human Achievement and Innovation in the Arts*.

These chapters were first presented as lectures at a two-day conference before an audience drawn from both the academic world and the community at large. Some of the talks were from papers composed for the conference, others from outlines referencing past work that was deemed relevant to the occasion. Each talk was followed by comments from a panel composed of two or three respondents, after which general questions and comments were taken from the floor. The conference took place March 19-21, 2014, in Tucson, Arizona, and was supported by a generous grant from The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation. The Center would also like to thank Harvey Motulsky and Lisa Norton, Norman Rogers, and I. Michael and Beth Kasser for their support, and thus for making this book possible.

# THE FUTURE OF HIGH ART IN AMERICA

TERRY TEACHOUT

Initiating one of the most widely read discussions of the prospects for high art and culture in America to appear in recent years, Heather Mac Donald gave the Manhattan Institute's Wriston Lecture last fall, which was subsequently published in *City Journal*, the Manhattan Institute quarterly. In it she started out by asserting that "in 2011, the University of California at Los Angeles decimated its English major." She then went on to detail what is by now a familiar sequence of academic occurrences:

Until 2011, students majoring in English at UCLA had to take one course in Chaucer, two in Shakespeare, and one in Milton—the cornerstones of English literature. Following a revolt of the junior faculty, however, during which it was announced that Shakespeare was part of the "Empire," UCLA junked these individual author requirements and replaced them with a mandate that all English majors take a total of three courses in the following four areas: Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Sexuality Studies; Imperial, Transnational, and Postcolonial Studies; genre studies, interdisciplinary studies, and critical theory; or creative writing. In other words, the UCLA faculty was now officially indifferent as to whether an English major had ever read a word of Chaucer, Milton, or Shakespeare, but was determined to expose students, according to the course catalog, to "alternative rubrics of gender, sexuality, race, and class."

According to Mac Donald, UCLA's English faculty has thereby repudiated "the humanist tradition" that extends back to the Renaissance, and in so doing has broken faith with Western civilization itself. More broadly, she claims that "the humanist reverence for past genius" is now "in exile" from the American academy, which ought to be its "natural home" but is now its sworn enemy.

Needless to say, none of this will surprise you. Such indictments, both blanket and specific, go all the way back to the publication in 1990 of Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals*. In the quarter-century since Roger's book came out, the cultural radicalism of the academy has been so widely

catalogued that in my particular line of work, daily journalism, articles that single out yet another academic assault on humanistic tradition have acquired a nickname. We call them “horror-story pieces,” as in *Oh, right, another horror-story piece about the MLA*.

Mac Donald’s lecture was much more than just another horror-story piece. It was, as is her wont, lengthy, detailed, and compelling. But it also told us something that we already knew—and I think it’s safe to say that it didn’t change any minds on either side. Those who already believe in the permanent importance of traditional high culture still believe in it. Those who don’t, don’t. And the latter are in charge—not just of the academy, but also of the mass media.

For most of the first half of the twentieth century, the mass media in America operated on the assumption that the upward mobility of middle-class Americans extended to cultural matters, and that anyone, educated or not, could appreciate high art as long as it was presented in an accessible, engaging way. But those days are long gone. Today, even PBS is increasingly disinclined to devote its precious air time to classical music or dance.

This fact has consequences. Classical music, for example, is no longer part of the vital center of American culture. It is rarely performed or talked about on network television. It is written about less often in newspapers and magazines. It is played less often on the radio. It is recorded much less often by the major labels. It is taught less often, and less well, in the public schools. And the men and women who run every performing-arts organization in America—every symphony orchestra, every opera company, every concert series—are painfully aware that fewer Americans are buying tickets to classical performances.

What is true of classical music is true to varying degrees of every other branch of the fine arts. I paid a Saturday-afternoon visit to the Newark Museum in New Jersey a couple of years ago, and spent an hour touring the two floors of “Picturing America,” the museum’s installation of its permanent collection of American art, one of the finest in the country. The only other people I saw there were seven youngsters who breezed through the second-floor gallery.

The situation in the performing arts is still more dire. Anyone who goes to operas, plays, or ballet performances knows what it feels like to sit

among a sea of bald and gray heads. Even such technologically up-to-date enterprises as the closed-circuit opera telecasts transmitted from New York's Metropolitan Opera House to movie theaters across America draw crowds consisting mainly of senior citizens. We live in a world where most people don't know who Verdi and Chekhov and Jackson Pollock and George Balanchine were—and where many a teacher either refuses to admit or is afraid to say that it's as important to know their names as it is to know the name of the last winner on *America's Got Talent*.

But once again, all of you know that. If you didn't, you wouldn't be reading this. And so it strikes me that at this point, the diagnostic phase of the high-culture debate is, or ought to be, over. Proponents of high culture know *exactly* what's wrong, have known it for years, and have documented it endlessly and eloquently. And the opponents and “weak supporters” of high culture—who in one form or another now dominate many of our cultural institutions—don't care, by which I mean that they're not open to persuasion from our side.

Hence it seems to me that we need to be talking not about what's wrong, but what is to be done. Enough about the committed enemies of high culture! How do we persuade the American middle class that the fine arts are part of what makes life worth living—and how best can we support institutions that exist to supply them with that kind of art?

To that end, we must start by frankly acknowledging that America as a whole is not an old-fashioned European-style culture. We are a popular culture, one in which high culture is capable of thriving under the right circumstances, but in which it will never be dominant. Most Americans have always looked to popular culture rather than high art to help bring meaning to their lives. For the most part, we prefer video games to great novels, sitcoms to Shakespeare, hip-hop to chamber music.

Time was when the mass media provided a countervailing influence to that preference by making high art part of their total cultural package—not just by televising Leonard Bernstein's *Young People's Concerts* but also by putting New York City Ballet on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and John Updike on the cover of *Time*. But that doesn't happen any more. What I call “the middlebrow moment” is over, both in the mass media and among the intellectuals. It used to be that our elites didn't take popular culture seriously, but more and more it seems that's all they take seriously.

Consider the endless encomia that greeted the airing in September of the final episode of *Breaking Bad*, which the *Daily Beast* described it as “a perfect, A-1 piece of televisual filmmaking...an unparalleled valedictory achievement.” Or the recent announcement by *LA Weekly* that it’s cutting back its theater reviews from seven per issue to two. Or the fact that no classical musician has appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine since 1986...but why go on? You know as well as I do that in postmodern America, pop culture gets most of the ink. It always has, but nowadays it also receives the kind of dead-serious critical attention in the academy and elsewhere that used to be reserved for high art—and increasingly it does so to the exclusion of high art.

It may well be, of course, that America’s pop culture is on balance better than our high art. I don’t think so, but you can certainly make a case that the best of it aspires to a degree of aesthetic and emotional seriousness directly comparable to all but the very greatest works of high art. Can you honestly say, for example, that *Grand Illusion* is a “better” movie than *Chinatown*? Or that Ned Rorem wrote “better” songs than Stephen Sondheim? Maybe, but I wouldn’t want to have to argue the point.

The problem is not that pop culture doesn’t deserve to be taken seriously. It’s that a culture totally dominated by popular art is by definition limited. I mentioned *Breaking Bad* a moment ago. Impressive though it is, it’s still all of a piece with most of the TV series that have come of late to be widely regarded as the best that America’s storytellers have to offer. From *Hill Street Blues* to *The Sopranos* to *The Wire* to *Breaking Bad*, these series are almost always thrillers of one kind or another, melodramas whose subject is crime, with a little romance thrown in for seasoning. To be sure, they use the conventions of genre fiction to explore many other aspects of American life—but in the end, somebody always gets shot, just as a pop song, no matter how good it may be, is almost always three minutes long.

Once again, it’s not my purpose to demean pop culture. Speaking as the biographer of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, I think I’m in a strong position to make a case for the excellence and significance of the best pop culture. But there’s more to life than getting your head blown off in a drug deal, and more to be said about love than can be crammed into a 32-bar ballad. Novels like Flannery O’Connor’s *Wise Blood*, plays like Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*, ballets like Jerome Robbins’s *Dances at a Gathering*, paintings like Jacob Lawrence’s *Migration Series*,

musical compositions like Aaron Copland's *Piano Sonata*: these are large-scale works of art that aim higher than their popular counterparts. In fact, that's not a bad rough-and-ready definition of high art.

Mere ambition, mind you, is not in and of itself a good thing, any more than bigger is by definition better. But we're cheating ourselves when we direct our attention solely to less ambitious art. Man cannot and need not live by masterpieces alone—so long as he never forgets what makes them masterpieces. A masterpiece, as Louis Armstrong said of the trumpet playing of Bobby Hackett, has “more ingredients.” Egalitarianism be damned: it really *is* better.

We know that—but what do we do about it? For the cold, hard fact is that we must now make a case for the fine arts. Throughout most of Western history, it would never have occurred to anyone to feel the need to do this. Their essential importance was taken for granted by all civilized human beings. No more. We must make ordinary people believe once again in the importance of high art, and we cannot do it by simply telling them that they should. They must be persuaded, not insulted, and in my experience, you don't persuade people to come to plays and operas and museums by telling them that they're dumb if they don't. That's the entitlement mentality, and we all know where that leads. So instead of waiting for a new generation of Americans to stumble across high art on their own, we're going to have to bring it to them and show them that it's worth having. And we can't count on the mass media to help us do it, much less the English departments of our elite colleges and universities.

Hence it is now more important than ever that we make ourselves more effective advocates for high art, and that we also develop and foster *new* institutions that exist solely to support and promote high culture. At the same time, the leaders of these new institutions must freely acknowledge the larger realities of American culture. If they deny the vitality and quality of the best popular culture, they will simply not be taken seriously by most Americans.

Moreover, these institutions will need to contend with the new technological realities that have reshaped the way in which Americans experience the arts in the twenty-first century. Today most Americans under the age of 30 are habituated to experiencing art not in the communal setting of a public performance but wherever and whenever they may wish to experience it, be it at home, in a plane, or on the beach. For them, live

performance is not the normal condition of art but a tiresomely inconvenient alternative to consuming art on demand.

I'm sure that most of you are familiar with the Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts that have been conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts, but I think it's worth taking a moment to review their findings. These surveys show an across-the-board decline in American public attendance at fine-arts events of all kinds, and attendance figures for individual art forms are unvaryingly disheartening:

- Between 1982 and 2008, the percentage of adult Americans who had attended at least one classical-music performance in the preceding year plummeted from 13 percent to 9.3 percent.
- Attendance at non-musical plays declined similarly during the same period, from 12 percent in 2002 to roughly 9 percent in 2008.
- Ballet attendance among college-educated adults has dropped by nearly 50 percent since 1982.
- In 2002, the year of the last survey, 10.8 percent of adult Americans attended at least one jazz performance. In 2008, that figure had fallen to 7.8 percent.

Most disturbing of all, the NEA surveys confirm what had long been suspected by arts presenters: from 1982 to 2008, audiences for performances in classical music, ballet, non-musical theater and—most conspicuously—jazz aged faster than the general adult population.

Some performers and presenters prefer not to engage with these statistics, but many others have faced the facts. The League of American Orchestras responded by releasing a report of its own which admits that classical music audiences are graying “faster than the general public” and that orchestras “cannot assume [as they once did] that people will attend more as they enter the 45+ age group.”

That's good news. Because the League is right: young people are not going to listen to arts advocates who preach the entitlement mentality. What they need is not persuasion but revelation. They need to be shown, respectfully and without the slightest trace of condescension, that high art matters not because it is “good for you” but because it is good, period.



Good in and of itself. Good not because it creates jobs but because it gives pleasure—and consolation.

I very much doubt that the fundamental desire of human beings to experience high art in one another's company is in imminent danger of dying out altogether. But those who seek to bring human beings together to experience art must find new ways to meet the challenge of offering potential audience members an appealing artistic experience significantly different in kind from that which they can obtain at home. At the same time, they must also find effective new ways to spread the word about the availability—and desirability—of such experiences.

And if they fail? There will never be a world without the fine arts, which speak to the deep-seated longing for beauty in the soul of man. But it is hard to imagine what the fine arts might be like if eager men and women no longer gathered in groups to experience their life-transforming power. A world without audiences would be a world denuded of one of the things that makes art an act of self-transcendence, a way of embracing the world and its myriad possibilities.

I believe with all my heart in the permanent significance and life-changing power of the masterpieces of Western art. But it isn't enough simply to shelve them in libraries, hang them in museums, or listen to them through headphones. Except for the reading of fiction, the experience of art has always been a fundamentally social phenomenon, one that brings human beings together and encourages them to submerge their differences in the shared pursuit of joy and understanding. Therein lies an essential part of the meaning of art—a part that is now at risk. Our job is to save it. A museum full of beautiful paintings whose galleries are empty of people is no longer a museum—it's a warehouse. Or a mausoleum.

It strikes me that at bottom we should be looking to turn the “diversity” argument on its head. A truly diverse culture is one that respects—and supports—both high art and pop culture. Our problem is not that cable-TV crime dramas and Broadway musicals are somehow inherently bad, but that too many people don't know there's anything else out there. And there's the most important part of our job: not to tell and retell horror stories, but to convincingly celebrate the glories of high art.

That's our strongest card, so long as we keep in mind that we cannot assume our cause is entitled to succeed. Instead of assuming that we're

right and that other people should know it, we must make the case for high art—day after day after day.

## PANEL RESPONSE

### **Paul Pines:**

I'm trying to think of an argument that would persuade people to pursue high art, if it guaranteed that they would age more quickly by doing so. I'm sure that's not what Terry meant by audiences aging more quickly. It's an interesting little etymological kind of reference, something that I think is true about his whole subject. Terry's presentation, as he talks about high art, certainly does open up the question of what the necessary development is in order to make this experience real. And, to my way of thinking, if we look at the roots of high art, they are religious, they're sacred, and they took place in mysteries of classical civilization, where there was a certain experience connected to them. The experience connected to them was the revelation of a mystery that was not visible unless you participated in this ritual. So the promise, the draw, the necessity, and the urgency of a culture that valued its mysteries—the Eleusinian mysteries, which for many centuries provided that kind of thing—and the plays of Sophocles and Euripides, these are all part of the mysteries and they provided for an experience which was fundamentally emotional; they called it cathartic. But it was through the exercise in this container of emotions which were perhaps otherwise considered dangerous to civilization—like those witnessed in dramas like *Breaking Bad*—in which people cannibalized each other, killed each other—that they felt all the dark emotions in their own shadow worlds, experienced them, experienced connection to each other, and walked out of that experience feeling a common humanity.

### **Terry Teachout:**

Herbert von Karajan once said he thought the reason he conducted *Tosca* well was that he could imagine he could do anything that Scarpia could do when he was conducting.

### **Pines:**

I think that's Terence: nothing human is alien to me. I would say what we're looking at today is the symptoms, and I think we can all agree on what the symptoms are: a disconnection, dissociation, a coming apart, a certain numbness, a certain inability to respond to the mystery, to what for

centuries made sense of humanism. Humanism, as it was thought about and practiced in the great universities, was not about necessarily being smart or bright; it was about connecting to the reasons we did what we did, to who we are as a species. And it made, on some level, for a reflective culture. There was room for reflection and a reflective space, an inner space, a psychological space with room to make new connections, to make new discoveries, and to appreciate the mystery that is our consciousness. It didn't necessarily direct us outward, into the world; it was, in fact, information that brought us inside, to reflect and then come out again. My own thinking about this for many years has been that with certain key technological changes, cultures change dramatically. When they put the plow in the earth, we went from a hunting culture to an agrarian culture. When Gutenberg made books available to everybody, we had a huge cultural shift. The cultural shift right now with electronic technologies teaches us that the medium is the message and presages another huge shock to the cultural organism.

They say in self-regulating organisms, biological organisms, there's a way in which they break down and reassemble given a certain amount of new information, and during that phase where they are breaking down to organize and to regroup, we have chaos. This is called chaos theory. It looks like chaos, but it's not really chaos. We're sure, because what comes out is another pattern, another paradigm that's of greater complexity. My sense is that we're in a shock period, a chaos period. We're betwixt and between. We're between one huge chunk of cultural definitions and what is yet to emerge—that we don't know about—and we're looking at these things and these symptoms, and we're thinking that it's broken down. That's why humanism isn't working. Humanism doesn't seem to speak to the basic mystery, to the hunger for something, to what's driving my hunger, to my passion. How do we reignite our connection, our human connection, our natural connection at this point of cultural change? How do we give birth again to the expression of this connection in a profound and real way? I don't know whether persuasion will allow it. It's a matter of persuasion and persuasion is a matter of belief. I can try to get you to believe as I do, but I can't make you experience it. The challenge is to make the experience real. And persuasion doesn't do that. Something else does that. I don't have an answer for this; I'm just articulating our sense of the question. What can we bring to the table that reignites and rekindles the inner urgency? And that raises the question of why we're so anxious as a culture to get away from things that create that inner space, why we flee things that create introspection, why we flee any kind of reflectiveness. I

think William James talked about this when he talked about the pleasure culture and I'm going to talk about that later. I think we're contending with a very serious challenge, not of pleasure because we have what's pleasurable heavily hyped, but it's not profound. What's pleasurable is not always what's profound. And there has to be a way of moving past what's pleasurable to what's profound.

**Teachout:**

Right. And pleasure is what gets you in the front door of the theater, the promise of pleasure. But I was struck by what you said a moment ago about people turning inward. I spend two or three nights a week in theaters. This is what I do now: I'm a drama critic. I see shows in theaters ranging in size from fifty to three thousand. And as you were talking, I thought about what the sequence of events is. People from all over a community, maybe even from beyond that community, come to this building, however large it is. All of them are men in different conditions, different people from different places with different expectations. They all go into a room and they all sit down and they all look in the same direction for ninety minutes, two hours, three hours, and they fall silent. They are alone but together in this room, attending in silence to an experience before them. That is a profoundly private thing. No matter how you're experiencing it, that transaction is a direct and individual transaction from them to you, but when it's over, you start to talk. And it seems to me that the indispensable part of the public performance is this set of opportunities to be alone but in a crowd, to have a private experience, but one you can share immediately and digest and reflect on.

Before I wrote primarily about drama, I wrote primarily about music, which functions the same way except that's it's an experience that recently people in this country tend to have by themselves. I think the miracle of theater, and the reason it's something I have chosen to commit myself to as a writer and now as a person who actually writes plays, is that you can't experience it that way. It is not like film. The theatrical experience can be had only as part of an audience, and it seems to me that that's a kind of model for what we ought to be offering, for what we should try to be advancing. We get them to buy the ticket; we get them through the front door by offering them the prospect of pleasure. But what we give them—if we do it well—is revelation and transformation, and then an opportunity to reach out to one another and share what they've just experienced. Perhaps the theatrical experience is in that way paradigmatic. At least, even though

it's an experience that's in trouble in terms of audience reach and in terms of companies and their budgets, it still seems to me to be unique.

I wrote a piece about this for the *Wall Street Journal* in January: that theaters don't know how to market the unique aspect of their own experience. The analogy I chose, a deliberately popular one in an effort to get people's attention, was that it's like going to one of the fancy new artisanal restaurants because they're offering something you can't get at home, something unlike anything else, something that's handmade for you. The theatrical experience, the experience of going to a concert—that's not what we're talking about, but it's the same thing—is handmade. It's a special kind of luxury object, but it's a luxury object that makes you a better person and it doesn't cost as much as buying a mink stole. I was struck when I looked at the way American theaters market themselves. They never mention this. Only a handful of companies talk on their websites about this unique aspect of a theater, which is its intimacy. A theatrical experience is always intimate. The biggest theater is still not that big. We're selling something you know. I mean what we're selling is revelation. We're selling self-transcendence. We're selling all of these amazing things that art can do for you. But we're selling it to people who don't know that it's good. We're selling it to a generation that doesn't have any experience with it. We have to find a way to communicate to them that we can give them something they've never had, that's better than what they're used to. Without condescension, without snobbishness, we have to tell them we've got something for them that they're going to like a lot. Maybe in a way they've never liked anything before is how much they're going to like this. That's the persuasion that I'm talking about. The only way that art persuades is by being experienced. I can't tell you in theory why *Hamlet*'s a good play. Well, I can, but who cares? It's like reading recipes; you've got to eat them. We have to get people to go to the restaurant.

### **From the Audience:**

I just want to say how great this session has been with the insights from both you guys. But I think there are two challenges. One is explaining what's so great, so pleasurable about this experience to those who don't have any preconceived notion of it. I've been in places where people clap between movements and they've never before heard Beethoven's Fifth Symphony live. And there's a kind of openness which argues against the need to convince these people of the pleasurable nature of this revelation when they have no preconceived notion about it. The

other challenge is in large communities within our country where kids bully other kids who strive towards something greater. It's as if there's a preconceived notion that if you like high art, you are elitist. Perhaps you could talk to us a little bit about those two groups. One is completely open to something new and potentially pleasurable, and the other already has a preconceived notion that they're not going to like it.

**Teachout:**

That's one of the main challenges. Ed Rothstein once said something that I've never forgotten. He said that the great thing about music is there's a sense in which it's self-teaching. Which means that merely to experience it, to sit there while it's playing, if you attend to it, is to find part of the way to comprehension. It happens. Take my brother, who is four years younger than I am—we come from a small town in southeast Missouri, but we are nothing alike. He's an auto mechanic. I think it's possible he's never read a book in adulthood. I'm afraid to ask him if he's read any of mine. But it happens that I took him to his first opera and his first Shakespeare play, both in the last five or six years. I wrote the opera so that doesn't count as much. But he and his wife visited my wife and me when we were in Florida, three years ago, and the Orlando Shakespeare Festival was doing *Hamlet*. I was covering it, so I had to go; so I said, "Look, you're only here for four nights. You guys don't have to go. You can do something else. You might find this fun. Just come." He was game. He said, "Sure." And I knew what not to do, essentially anything other than just suggesting that he might come. I didn't tell him what *Hamlet* was about. I didn't tell him how great it was. I didn't tell him anything. I did know that Orlando's Shakespeare productions ... populist is not precisely the right word, but they're accessible. They've got a lot of stage blood, a lot of mist, and a lot of trapdoors, which is great. So, we were seated in the front row and it was one of those thrusts where the playing area is on the same level as the first row. My brother is sitting next to me. We sit down. The show starts. I'm not nudging him. I'm not telling him this is going to be good, but I'm watching him out of the corner of my eye. And he becomes completely immersed, engrossed in this thing. He was thrilled by it. He had never seen anything like it. And I don't think I'll ever forget that experience because he came to it clean, without any of the trappings, without any of the eat-your-spinach trappings of high culture that say "this is good for you; this will make you a better person." Okay, I really think that seeing *Hamlet* will make you a better person, but that's the last thing in the world to tell somebody who's never seen it, because you know exactly how they're going to respond.

How do we deal with the other side of your coin, which is the same thing that you encounter among kids who discourage people from speaking up in class or wanting to go to college? I don't know how we deal with it. That's a different problem, involving the experience of education. But I do know that in order to get people into the theater without preconception, we have to tell them not that it's good for them, but that they'll have fun. And we have to be confident that they're going to have fun. When I was going to the ballet a lot—the great thing about being a critic is you always get two tickets—at that point I didn't know all that many people who went to the ballet—six times, seven times out of ten I was taking people who had never gone and they all asked the same thing, which was, “Well, what do I need to know?” And I said, “Well, you need to know that the stage is that way [pointing]. That's it. You don't need to know about fouettés or any other technical language. It might be fun, later on, if you get curious, to find out about stuff. But basically all you need to do is be there with your eyes open. And, of course, I had to choose carefully. There are some works I would not take someone who has never been to a concert to hear: Schoenberg's *Orchestral Variations*, for example. Or probably I wouldn't take somebody who'd never seen any dance to—well, you can't do it any more—to a Merce Cunningham performance. Whenever I was thinking of what to take people to, I would always think of accessibility, not in the crude sense, but in the sense of an immediate appeal and then something beyond that. And I was just amazed at how well this worked.

And when I came to write a book about George Balanchine, which I did a few years ago, I deliberately wrote it for the people I had been taking to the ballet. I wanted to write a book that had not existed when I started going to the ballet, the book you wanted to read after you had seen your first Balanchine ballet or just before, if you got curious about it. These are the things that we have to keep in mind when we're looking to what I call persuasion, which is a little bit off the plumb of what you were talking about. We have to encourage, but the strongest tool at hand is to get them into the theater, without dressing it in the eat-your-spinach trappings that I hate so much. So that's my job now. You know, I write every Friday, a drama column for the largest paper in the United States. I am not writing for people who go to Broadway twice a week. Some of those people read it, but that's not who I'm writing for. I'm writing for—I used to say I wrote my Louis Armstrong book for my mother—I'm writing for folks. I want to write in a clear, intelligible—if possible—exciting way. I want to



communicate the enthusiasm I feel in a way that is contagious, not off-putting, and that's what we've got to do.

**Daniel Asia:**

I thought what might be the most useful at this point is to talk about the one particular segment, where it's not just a matter of approaching things with an open heart and open mind. When I was composer-in-residence with the Phoenix Symphony, what I would tell any concert goer was, you don't have to like every new piece of music that you're going to hear, because not every piece is going to be a great piece of music; that's just the way it is. New things are not automatically masterpieces. But you do have to come with an open heart and an open mind and be ready for the experience. But there is another place that we need to talk about and that is education, teaching students. You talked about the problem of the middle-brow moment being lost, and the middle-brow moment to me represents a time when people could strive to find something that was new, that was deeper and meaningful to them.

**Teachout:**

And in which they had a baseline of respect even for things they didn't know about. That was really a big part of it. A guy like Ed Sullivan was as much of a philistine as anyone who ever lived—I mean if you know anything about him as a person—but he respected this stuff enough to put it on his show.

**Asia:**

Now, we're really in an academic environment all the way from K up through the university system where the baseline is not enough, or rather where somebody, in fact, has to decide what's going to be taught, what's going to be purveyed to students at all levels. And we can say at this point in that domain that—I'm just going to talk about the university for right now—the four years you have here are something that you should treat yourself to. Another way to put it would even be to say that you should be confronted with this. I don't know. That's off-putting. Maybe we should say that human beings for about five or six thousand years have looked at these things, have listened to these things, and been moved by them. Before we discount them, before we jettison them altogether, that you—as somebody who aspires to be (can one say this?) an educated person, to have learned something, to come out knowing something about yourself, about the culture of which you're a part—should confront these things. Not because they're spinach, but because you might find that these are

things of such extreme beauty that you'll want to deal with them, absorb them, and experience them throughout your life. Like the old commercial: try it, you'll like it!

**Pines:**

I think it's important is to ask the question why it's so hard to make a convincing argument about it. And I think to determine or to at least approach that question, one has to ask why the systems that were in place—the symbol systems, from the Paleolithic age right on down to the twentieth century—broke down, why they emptied, why the vessels emptied, why the connections became disconnected. One first has to look at that as reality and establish it as context before one can make a compelling argument about reconnection. Simply to assume that exposure is the answer is problematic. I, by the way, think it was Ben Franklin who first changed our curriculum and removed European humanist studies from it. The same man who created the first philosophical organization in many libraries removed humanism from the universities. Before that, Cotton Mather had gone into Harvard at fourteen knowing Aramaic, Greek, and Latin and then written wonderful tracts convincing everybody that witches deserved to be tried on spectral evidence, so there's no guarantee that a great deal of knowledge will have the desired results. We need to ask ourselves about how things have broken down and how we can make them attractive to people who have a different experience. There is something I believe, which is that the human psyche and its requirements have not changed. I think it's been exposed to a radical change in context, but I think the requirements of the psyche for balance, for inspiration, for all of those things that keep the mind healthy, remain the same. But how do we connect that to the curriculum under the present circumstances? We just can't assume that people who are products of our culture today are going to respond to, "Come in; try it; you'll like it." I don't think that's the way to make it really convincing. It's something that has to be addressed. And I'm not sure exactly how, but perhaps to make it relevant to their own development, to say there's going to be a spotlight shown on the mysteries of your own psyche, of your own development, is part of the solution. Perhaps this will do it, and nothing else will in a convincing way.

**Teachout:**

That's the power of theater.

**Pines:**

That's the power of art.

**Teachout:**

In the specific case of theater, which is a verbal art form that also integrates visual information, people understand that; it can be explained to them. In a way it's harder with music. Music is completely contingent on the actual experience itself.

**Pines:**

You can curriculate that, make it a course of study.

**Teachout:**

I don't know what's to be done for that. Maybe nothing. If you were going to take anything away from my prepared remarks, it would be what I said toward the end about the idea of possibly turning the contemporary notion of diversity on its head and saying that a truly diverse curriculum would be one that makes room for these other things as well. Because when we move into the academic environment, we are moving into essentially hostile terrain. And if that's true—and in most cases I think it's pretty clearly true—then we may have to come at this by fitting their language to our purposes. Maybe.

**Asia:**

Their "language," meaning?

**Teachout:**

The language of diversity, the diversity argument. A truly diverse curriculum is one that will also have room for Shakespeare.

**Asia:**

We are often dealing with many kids in the next generation who don't really have a connection to their emotional selves. They can't speak an emotional language. And they're also unwilling to do so, by the way. That's dangerous terrain for many of them.

**Teachout:**

They speak the language of what I call irony lite.

**Asia:**

Okay, irony. It's very hard to pin them down and say, "Do you like what you just heard? What's your response to what you just heard? What did you feel when you saw that dance?" Whether they felt something is

unclear, but even if they did, they don't know how to respond to it. They have trouble.

**Pines:**

They have trouble responding to it except in terms of violence, special effects, exaggerated images...

**Teachout:**

You know what? I think they're feeling the same thing we feel; they're just afraid to admit it.

**Pines:**

Well, it's called disconnection.

**Teachout:**

Yeah.

**From the Audience:**

I'm not sure that there *is* a disconnection.

**Teachout:**

We're talking about kids now, I guess. Millennials.

**From the Audience:**

Yes, that part is clear, but I feel like...

**Pines:**

If you'd spent time in classrooms ...

**From the Audience:**

I have. That's my profession.

**Pines and Teachout:**

You don't feel the disconnection as well?

Good, so you've had a different experience.

**From the Audience:**

I don't. I have. Some anyway, and I think part of a convincing argument is not to make the argument in the first place, but to assume that they can do all the things that we think we can do.

**Teachout:**

That's what I think.

**From the Audience:**

And not to say to them that they are impaired by their lack of culture or whatever, and in order to become unimpaired, do what we do; I think you don't do that.

**Teachout:**

Even if you think it, you mustn't say it.

**From the Audience:**

But I don't even think it anymore. Maybe my kids are misfits, different from the ones in New York, but what you're saying about breaking up and re-forming ... they have that, but it's a different rubric they're organizing under.

**Pines:**

I wouldn't argue against that for a minute, but what I would say is this. I would say that developmentally, connectedness in children who have been brought up in the electronic age they're experiencing, with the enormous amount of stimulation from the time they were old enough to sit in front of the screen and watch packaged imagery pass by them; that is quite different from what centuries of children experienced before.

**From the Audience:**

What are we part of?

**Pines:**

Well, I think it depends on what your age is. You're younger than I am.

**From the Audience:**

I am.

**Teachout:**

(Smiling) We'll discuss that later.

**Pines:**

The example I usually give is—you know I came of age before television and I used to listen to the radio. I remember on Sundays the

programs on the radio would come on and I would lie in bed and listen to, for instance, *Gunsmoke*. And James Arness would come out on *Gunsmoke*, a hidden voice ...

**Teachout:**

Actually, that was William Conrad.

**Pines:**

You're right. It *was* William Conrad. And I'd listen to his beautiful deep voice and the image in my mind would be redolent of me at that age. In other words, there'd be aspects of my imagined self at that age that I would identify with in the drama. And so there was information about my own inner space, in the imaginal space I had as a child of the radio culture. When I got a television and I turned on *Gunsmoke*, and Marshall Dillon turned out not to be the image of me, but of a seven-foot actor, there was something shocking there. My identity with it was no longer possible because the received imagery had a profoundly different feel to it than the other.

As I grew older and tried to analyze the difference, I became aware that what you produce from your imaginal space, from your imaginal interior, just like your dream space, always has hidden information encoded about yourself reflected back to you. When you're looking at enormous amounts of stimulation in front of you, that have been prepackaged, none of that imaginal information is there; something else is there. It came as a great shock to me when I first entered a classroom—and I didn't enter a classroom until I was forty years old—and I said to someone, *Hamlet* is, as far as I know, one of the first theatrical demonstrations of inner space. It was a little weird. One of my students raised a hand and said, "Inner space? What's inner space?" I said, "Well, that's the space in which you reflect on your own thought process. That's the space in which your sense of your own inner voice comes to you," and the looks that came back at me were utterly blank. Inner space. Is it possible that their experience has rendered the experience of inner space in a different way than mine? And I came to the conclusion it is so. Not that they don't have the capacity to experience that inner space, but the circumstances of their development to some degree have been different enough that we don't share it and they don't immediately recognize it when I point to it. That's all I'm saying.